



This year's International Women's Day theme underscores the power of reciprocity and generosity. PHOTO/COURTESY

Give To Gain: Framing gender equality as a shared investment

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BY SYLVIA NAMAGEMBE

For more than a century, International Women's Day has stood as both a celebration and a call to action. First observed in 1911, the global movement has grown into one of the most widely recognized platforms for advancing gender equality.

Yet, despite 115 years of advocacy, many of the structural barriers that limited women's advancement in the early 20th century persist today, from unequal pay and limited leadership representation to discrimination and gender-based violence.

What distinguishes International Women's Day is its inclusive character. It is not owned by a single government, organisation or movement.

Rather, it belongs to everyone who believes in equality, from policymakers and activists to business leaders, teachers and young people alike.

Each year on March 8, the world pauses to celebrate women's achievements across political, economic and social spheres, while also raising awareness about the discrimination that continues to hinder progress. But beyond celebration, the day carries a deeper responsibility of taking measurable action towards closing gender gaps.

This year's theme: 'Give To Gain'

The 2026 theme is, "Give To Gain," which shifts the conversation from symbolic recognition to intentional contribution.

At its core, the message suggests that when societies give, whether through resources, opportunities, protection or policy reform, everyone gains.

According to the official International Women's Day campaign website, the theme underscores the power of reciprocity and generosity, noting that advancing women's equality is not a subtraction of power, but an intentional multiplication of opportunity.

"Give To Gain" emphasises that progress depends on what individuals, institutions and communities are willing to contribute. Giving can take many forms such as donations, mentorship, education, advocacy, funding, time or visibility. This is grounded in a belief that when women thrive, communities benefit economically and socially.

The campaign envisions a gender-equal world free of bias, stereotypes, and discrimination in a society that is diverse, equitable, and inclusive where differences are valued and celebrated with equal participation.

Why the theme matters

The significance of the 2026 theme lies in framing gender equality as a shared investment rather than a symbolic aspiration. By urging individuals, institutions and governments to "give" whether through funding, opportunity, policy reform or mentorship, the campaign positions gender parity as a multiplier effect for economic and social development.

In Uganda's context, the message carries particular weight.

According to the 2024 Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS) report, women comprise over 75 percent of the agricultural labor force, contributing significantly to food production and rural livelihoods.

However, the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social development reports that only 28 percent of women own agricultural land, a reflection of entrenched inequalities in land rights.

Similarly, findings from the Afrobarometer report show only about 16 percent of land in Uganda is registered in women's names, limiting their access to credit and long-term economic security.

Women are also heavily concentrated in the informal sector, where income is

UN THEME

The United Nations theme for 2026, "Rights. Justice. Action. For ALL Women and Girls," focuses on removing structural barriers. This theme encourages practical action. It asks individuals, organisations, and governments to invest in women in meaningful ways.

Give To Gain emphasizes the power of reciprocity as support. When people, organisations, and communities give generously, opportunities and support for women increase. Giving is not a subtraction, it's intentional multiplication. When women thrive, we all rise.